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THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF SOCIOLOGY

VOLUME XXI

JULY 1915

NUMBER I

THE DUPLICITY OF DEMOCRACY DEMOCRATIC EQUALITY AND THE PRINCIPLE OF RELATIVITY

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There is one point in the philosophy of democracy that I venture to believe has not had the recognition which it merits and I would therefore make it the subject of this paper.

Of course basal to all democracy has been the idea of equality. Since the contract philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not to go farther back in history and not to mention other contributors even of that time or of later times to the philosophy of democracy, equality has been, to all intents and purposes, a dogma of democracy. Also, as is natural in all dogmatism, there has been a strong disposition to forget that terms, as they actually come into use, must be relative to certain conditions, applying only to a certain context and above all not applying or at least not necessarily applying universally and exhaustively to all the facts and conditions, to the things actual and the things possible, in human life. To take any term in positive use as exhaustive and absolute, thus abstracting it from its context, is to be blind to some important implication of its use and so to some important element of its actual and living meaning at the time and place of its rise.

Even equality, then, must be a relative term. To take it generally or abstrusely, as so often it has been taken, is to betray its

origin in vital human experience and accordingly in just so far to render it impracticable and so to cause the democratic movement inspired by it, as well as the special end or purpose which that movement must be supposed to imply, to be seriously misunderstood and retarded. Indeed, from such abstruseness, whatever violence and instability may ensue, there can come only a virtual conservatism of life. Conservatism and its delays, of course, are often of advantage, but the immediate point is that, while startling changes may ensue, substantial progress cannot come until the inspiring ideas are mindful of their origin and loyal to it. That the democratic movement, when it rises, must imply some purpose, must itself be a means to some end and not just an end in itself, goes almost if not quite without saying, I think; unless, forsooth, democracy be quite unique among the really good things of the earth, being not good for something but good only for itself, good absolutely and intrinsically. The necessary relativity, the only contextual meaning, of democratic equality and this purposive or mediative and instrumental value of democracy go together.

Let me illustrate, although now on very broad lines. There can be little doubt, I think, that those contract philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in their democratic intent were specifically anti-militaristic. Their call for equality, too, met the military monarchy of the time, which virtually when not openly claimed divine sanction, most squarely; meeting it, in other words, in kind by insisting that God himself had created all men free and equal. The equality called for, however, was no abstractly general one, but was grounded in just those rights, natural rights so called, which militarism most obviously had been interfering with, namely, life and liberty of person and the safe possession of property. In the minds of both the philosophers of the time and their readers the military monarchies with traditions rooted even in the Roman Empire gave definite meaning and point and in particular gave polemical animus to the terms, however seemingly abstract, which were employed; nor, the issue being then so much a matter of course, should one expect much attention at the time to definition or limitation of the terms. Contexts, that is, the specific historical settings that define terms in use, commonly are not seen so clearly

at the time of the terms' rise as afterward. The outcry of revolution in France, "Liberty, Fraternity, Equality," affords a notable example of this.

But, those philosophies of democracy being thus anti-militaristic in their call for equal rights, what was the specific purpose which such democracy was intended to serve? Historically the answer is quite easy. Anti-militarism or rather the peculiar democracy which, if I may use an algebraic term, would "satisfy" anti-militarism, was to be established in order that there might be opportunity for the new life, the new kind of life, then setting in and already demanding fair recognition. I mean, of course, the life of commerce and industry. Leveling men democratically with respect to all military aggressiveness, undoing the traditional military aristocracy, was the way or the instrument, the means, by which industrialism was to come to its own. One aristocracy, depending, as I would suggest, on might and a mighty God, was to be leveled, all men being recognized as henceforth equally mighty kings by divine right, and with such leveling and the consequent check put upon the militarism was to be replaced by another and higher aristocracy, dependent on reason and a rational, a lawful and mechanical nature, to the high estate and large opportunity of which even God—witness the changes in theological doctrine—as well as man was to be raised. So was democracy to be, just what in the recent centuries I believe it to have been, the mediator, or say the agent of the transition, between a passing and a rising, a lower and a higher, aristocracy.

Nor must the passing of the earlier aristocracy be supposed for a moment to be only negative—in the sense of the new wholly replacing the old. Probably no one would so misunderstand what I have said, but all possibility of misunderstanding must be avoided here. Moreover, the positive way in which the old persists in the new is interesting in itself. Thus the change is an evolutionary, not a revolutionary, one. Industrialism is not and has not been the mere supplanting of militarism, but (*a*) its control, its being made a matter of life to self, as we say of a child learning to read to self and as we can directly see in so-called armed neutrality, and then also (*b*) its positive mediation, its employment of force and mechanical

contrivance turning from exploitation of human beings, their bodies and their personal interests, to exploitation of natural or physical forces and resources. Thus, as to this mediation, when nowadays one views the turning of some great labor-saving or, more generally, human-nature-saving machine, contrasting it with the movement of that other machine, an army, to which human flesh and human feeling have been so often sacrificed, one must exclaim, as one appreciates the great control and the mediation which history has been bringing about: "Force and system henceforth for man; no longer man for force and system! Behold! The soldier, not has given way before, but himself has grown to, the mechanic, becoming himself the humanly free, skilful user of force and system." Again, industrialism is not militarism supplanted, but militarism, its might and its system or organization, made only mediate to human life, or say also—if I may hope to be understood—militarism vicarious in the natural environment, militarism dehumanized and objectified.¹ Such a change, man coming freely to use the very force and system that once bound and used him at an almost incalculable cost of efficiency, is, then, the positive side of the passing of militarism and it results, as was suggested, from the acquired self-control, from man's learning to be military to himself. Only as one recognizes this positive side, I must insist, can one really appreciate how an anti-militaristic democracy is mediator between a military and an industrial aristocracy, and in a later paragraph there will be occasion for further reference to this meaning of self-control as in general bringing free use or mediation rather than suppression; but sufficient now is the specific instance that our own historic anti-militaristic democracy has been serving to dehumanize militarism and its mechanicalism and so to bring them to a free and an efficient service of human life. The increase in efficiency, I suggest, is proportional to the dehumanization and objectification.

¹And I would suggest, in a note, that as militarism passes into industrialism, becoming mediate, being dehumanized and objectified, even so at the same time in the intellectual sphere legalism, the natural rational life of militarism, becomes objectively rationalistic, being freed from the prejudice of human interest and institution, and so gives way to, or grows into, mathematics and mathematicalism, the natural rational life of industrialism.

Now history affords a second illustration of the rôle of democracy as a mediator. Thus, to go back to earlier times in the Christian era, even the Roman and mediaeval military aristocracy had and needed its own peculiar democratic foundation. Both church and state had their parts in that militarism, and in maintenance of it both relied on a certain and specific democracy. Both had to proceed on an assumption of equality among men and, what is more, consciously to recognize this equality. True, their equality was spiritual; it was not in terms of rights involving positive worldly relations, like those of life, liberty, and property; but their spiritual equality was just the sort that made a military aristocracy, an aristocracy of might and a mighty God, possible. Physical or military equality, equality with a certain natural and earthly content, leveling men in actual earthly conditions and relations, was indeed to come later and was, as pointed out here, to make modern industrial aristocracy, an aristocracy of reason and machinery, possible; but in those earlier days of Christendom's history, democracy, waiting as it had to on achievement, on the acquisition of earthly content for its equality, could be little more than a spiritual principle. All that such a principle of equality required of men as earthly beings in the beginning, when its great office was to mediate between the passing pagan civilizations and the rising Christian civilization, was what, among other things, the pagan philosophies, namely, the Stoic's apathy, the Skeptic's forgetfulness of reality, even the Epicurean's *carpe diem* superiority to death or to fate in any form, had been training them to. By those philosophies and the general atmosphere which they both expressed and helped to strengthen the Mediterranean peoples were taught to give up their cherished pasts, in a splendid self-control resigning themselves to whatever the course of history might bring, and in the democratic leveling, to which through such earthly self-denial they were brought, Roman militarism had its peculiar opportunity. Both the Roman law, moreover, and the Roman religion recognized the spiritual equality of men and only with the progress of life, the years and the centuries passing, did such equality, at first so empty of earthly conditions and relations, acquire—even through the very achievements of militarism itself—concrete embodiment, the earthly rights of life

and liberty and property being finally *won* as "natural rights." When the aristocracy of might, made possible by spiritual equality, had thus achieved these rights, it gave way to the higher aristocracy of reason.

And by way of a third illustration, there are those, I cannot refrain from adding, who are disposed to think—of course in their more optimistic moods—that our present industrial aristocracy of reason must some day give way to something still higher. After its competitive life of cold rationalistic calculation and physically mechanical skill, which in spite of its being still hampered by military methods and ideas has accomplished so much especially in the last century and has also spread the benefits and opportunities of its accomplishments so widely among men, a new democracy, even an anti-industrial democracy, ought to be possible. On the equality of such a democracy, furthermore, a new aristocracy, for which I am at loss for a name, unless we may call it, in witness to its super-rational character, an aristocracy of the will, the inventive and the creative will, could then be established. So some men nowadays do, or at least in justification of what they seem to believe, might reason, and *sotto voce*, among other possible signs of the change they see or imagine, I suspect feminism ought not to be overlooked by any would-be prophet. Also the prophet should not overlook pragmatism, Bergsonism, and any other of the many irrationalisms or superrationalisms of the day on this side or the other of Christendom's ocean. Even a certain orientalism may be a significant factor.

As to what "natural rights" would properly be claimed by an anti-industrialistic democracy we may not say, at least not very glibly. Life, liberty, and property are at the tip of nearly everybody's tongue, but what would be the new rights? In spite of the difficulty I suggest: Instead of mere life, useful occupation or work; instead of mere liberty of person, the freedom of an educated skill; and instead of safety in the possession of property or in the special pursuit of happiness which such safety enables, the unhampered opportunity of using and enjoying the present highly developed machinery of social life. Say, concisely, work, and education, and commerce. Of course such rights, however "natural," would still

carry responsibilities, large responsibilities, but I only call attention to this fact. I do so, however, with emphasis, lest someone be tempted to pervert and misapply my suggestion that work and education and commercial facility are natural rights. Contrary to what many have at least seemed to believe, the more *natural* rights are, the more certain and the more vital are the pertaining responsibilities. Although not discussing the responsibilities pertaining to these new rights, I cannot help wondering and asking my readers to wonder at the possible results, should a democracy based upon them ever be well established. Suppose men were equal with respect to them instead of just with respect to life, liberty, and the safe enjoyment of property. Suppose, men being thus equal, the activities possible under the condition of industrial inequality were put under efficient control, being henceforth of the nature of activities to self, and so in the changed life of men a condition analogous to that of a military armed neutrality and of the positive mediation growing out of the neutrality were brought about. Then this question: Would the new life, made possible by such new self-control, be as great an advance in quality and in efficiency over industrialism as industrialism itself has been over militarism? The question has somehow asked itself and it is certainly an interesting speculation, but I offer no answer here. Some may still hold that industrialism and its reign of routine, of reason, and machinery are the last word of civilization.

Do I seem to have digressed somewhat? Possibly I have; but, be it hoped, not seriously. Still, possibilities of present and future aside, with such illustration as has now been given from actual history it seems fair to conclude at least that any movement for leveling mankind, the equality required being necessarily only contextual, must mean the developed or developing interest in some new type of action, evolutionary in character rather than revolutionary, and the disposition accordingly to live under some new system of values. At risk of mere repetition, the democratic cry for equality at any time must refer to fairly well-established conditions, to a traditional type of life, the opportunity of which has been widely and generally realized by mankind, and furthermore it must imply that its demanded equality is for the sake of the freer development

of some new action and valuation. Possibly the hackneyed phrase "equality of opportunity" tells the whole story, but I am not aware that this phrase has usually been definitely understood to mean what I would now take it to mean and what the illustrations from history would seem to make it mean—democracy on one level, the level of the traditional conduct of life, the possibilities of achievement in which have been largely if not wholly exhausted, in the service of opportunity without the restraints of democracy on some higher level, the level of life under some new vision, *the possibilities of which have still to be worked out*. Always with respect to the lower level men can afford to cry; indeed, if there is to be any real advance, they can hardly afford not to cry: "Long live democracy!" But for the higher level, until once more possibilities which are still latent have been fully exploited and their realization widely distributed among men, this must be the cry: "Let the best win and to the winners the appropriate rewards." So may or rather, in spite of all the efforts of the absolutists, so do and so must democracy and aristocracy live together, working shoulder to shoulder for the progress of humanity; a democracy of only spiritual equality with a military aristocracy of worldly might; of worldly might, with an industrial aristocracy of reason; and, if I may refer again to the suggested possibility for the future, of reason, with an aristocracy—but here the right name was hard to find—of a superrational, creative will. Each new aristocracy, too, as must be kept in mind, the changes being evolutionary, can be no mere supplanting of its predecessor; rather must it depend upon, or consist in, the life of its predecessor being made freely mediate, vicarious, objective.

Apart from various incidental discussions, I have touched so far, as may now be extracted, on three things: first, the only relative or contextual meaning of equality; second, the purposive or only mediative value of equality or of the democracy based on it; and third, what may be styled the natural and necessary duplicity of democracy; the last of these being only a conclusion from, or interpretation of, the other two.

The duplicity of democracy! The phrase can refer only to the fact, which appears to me very like a law, that in any time of democracy of any sort or degree there must be two different and more

or less distinct levels of life and interest. These two levels moreover, as shown by the examples from history, are always in conflict with each other, even as past and future, tradition and vision are always in conflict; also they must constantly suffer from confusion with each other, although at the same time getting more and more distinct, this confusion being only a phase of their conflict; and yet, however much liable to confusion, they must in reality be different qualitatively, different in kind. Their difference in kind, then, is most pointedly the source of democracy's duplicity or at least of a duality involved in all democracy. As for duplicity, I am using this term because democracy seems to me to have been quite in the habit of concealing or, if not deliberately concealing, then not always fully and openly facing and appreciating its own real design, its interest in something besides equality, its service of aristocracy of a new sort, on the higher level.

The question is really one of progress, of what makes progress. Progress, if there be such a thing, certainly must imply the rise from one type or level of action to another, from one system to another system of values. This we have virtually seen already and it seems to me axiomatic. Equally axiomatic is the following: Democratic leveling under the earlier type, natural only when the possibilities have been practically exhausted, *must be a condition of rise to the later*. In other words, as all that has been said here so far has constantly implied, democracy must mark at once the closing stage of an aristocracy of some lower order, *this being an object of its legitimate attack*, and the inception of an aristocracy of some higher order, *this being the proper object of its ideal endeavor*. Objects, however, of such opposite interests, one of attack, the other of endeavor, in their relation to the life of their time, in their value, must really differ in kind. Moreover, in further explanation of this qualitative difference, the purpose of the attack on the life of the lower order, the purpose of democratizing it, is to destroy its traditionally institutional character and to make it only generally instrumental or, in the word already so much used here, mediative, that is, to make it the common privilege and property of all men. Only by such democratization can it be made freely a medium or instrument of life, ceasing to be for any part of society an end in

itself, and only as the life of the lower order is made mere medium or instrument can any substantial success attend the efforts of men to realize the life of the higher order. Doubtless I am getting tediously repetitious, but, again, the institutional becoming instrumental or mediative by democratization is an indispensable condition of progress from one level of life to a higher level. Indeed I know no better definition of higher than what is thus suggested: the immediate become mediate, the institutional become instrumental. But, where two objects or factors of life and interest, like the passing and the rising aristocracy, differ as means and end, there must be difference in kind; quite analogous, I would even suggest, to that between the material and the spiritual, and, like that, only to be understood as a moving or functional duality, not a metaphysically fixed one, or fixed only in principle, not in content or application. Even in that phrase, "equality of opportunity," there is involved the distinction between means and end and so the duality of difference in kind. The democratic motive, I must say with Catonic persistence, is the leveling of men under a traditional order to the end that, the old institutes becoming common and standard instruments, equal opportunity and facility may be provided for the free and productive rivalry of men under the new order.

As to the method of the leveling, this would seem to lie in all proper measures of socialistic tendency. Socialism, in so far as concerned with making the *already developed* means and instruments of life common to all the members of society, has its legitimate place and work. It should not interfere with further development and improvement or with pioneer enterprises, always so dependent on individual initiative and competition, but it may very properly insist on communalization of so much as has been largely if not wholly exploited. The single-tax measure, for example, looks to me very like a measure of legitimate socialism, because it would impose a check on individual exploitation of real property, as militarism has valued property, for the sake of its exploitation in ways consistently and progressively industrial. Again, democratization of banking facilities, as in the recent establishment of regional federal banks, seems calculated to do the same thing or at least to

contribute toward doing the same thing for personal property. Such measures, then, as these two and, to give another example, as the state regulation of rates at least in their apparent purpose, whatever might be or may be their outcome, will sufficiently indicate my meaning. Of course judgment as to time and seasons, as to whether or not a given resource or instrument of life is sufficiently developed to be a proper object of communalization, must always be difficult and there will hardly ever be anything over which socialists and individualists may not have some controversy, but some socialism society must always have, and a socialism, too, that is constantly acquiring new objects or fields for its application, if there is to be any real progress in individualism and its opportunities. So, I repeat, socialistic measures afford the method by which, men being leveled, democracy mediates between a passing and a rising aristocracy. Unfortunately many people are socialists without any thought of the mediation just as many are democratic without any thought of equality being only a relative term.

Democracy is growing, as we proceed, into a term of very large meaning. Conclusively from the relativity of equality or the mediative character or the duplicity of democracy or, more exactly, from what we have seen these to imply, democracy not only cannot stand alone or be at any time unmixed but also never can be a matter just of some one period or another. Its significance is far more fundamental than that. Since every democracy by providing a certain equality of opportunity mediates some new aristocracy or since every aristocracy presupposes some democracy, then democracy must be more than just a name for some particular form of government or some particular era; it becomes a name for something that, so to speak, by night when not by day, is present and active in all governments and all eras. Democracy is one of the two ever-present motives of all history; aristocracy being the other.

Is it not generally better to talk and think of motives or principles instead of eras? Or at least always to supplement the one view with the other? To understand any principle, however, one should see it in at least two different settings or from two different angles. So, changing the viewpoint somewhat, the change being

after all not very great, the principle of democracy is a principle which asserts itself in all conflict and which develops in respect to its applications and manifestations with the development of conflict through all its various types. Also it appears under various guises which are more or less positive and direct in their recognition or presentation of it. Balance of power, fair play, armed neutrality, rules of the game, agreement as to weapons, and the like are some of the guises that may be mentioned. In an article recently published in this journal,¹ "Five Great Battles of Civilization," I undertook to show, among several other things, that all conflict tends toward balance or equality; in other words, that every battle tends in course of time to become a drawn battle. I mean or meant, of course, every type of battle, not necessarily any particular encounter. Thus methods and processes of fighting, whatever they be, from being more or less one-sided tend to become common property, this being the democratization; with the outcome that finally the contestants meet as so much action and so much equivalent reaction, and that action from either side directly in the form of just those methods and processes comes to an end, being neutralized. Whence the standstill, the drawn battle. Whence, also, a sort of common status, or equality, as determined by the common methods and processes. But, to go on, again restating what was said in the earlier article, a drawn battle must always induce a new type of battle. To quote briefly:

Nothing is more suggestive or illuminating than this change that apparently is always incident to the battle of well-equipped but especially of equally matched men. . . . Of course victory must always be to the best man and, unless my vision greatly deceive me, the best man, the opponents being evenly matched, must always win by devising, not just a new kind of fighting, but, as was said, a new kind involving more self-control, that is, involving—for what else does self-control mean?—free and conscious [or mediate, not immediate] use of the existing conditions and relations. . . . In short, in such a meeting there is always induced a battle of kinds in addition to the battle of magnitudes [or say of equated masses or forces] . . . and the best kind [the kind involving more self-control, more mediation, more finesse] always wins and winning raises the plane of future struggles.²

The higher struggle is not independent of the forces employed in the lower, but in it these forces are used with less confusion of

¹ September, 1913.

² P. 174.

means and end. Industrialism and militarism, for an example that will take us back to familiar ground, both use physical force for human ends, but the latter with appalling inefficiency, since human nature is itself so much exploited physically. Industrialism, although often suffering from militaristic entanglements, serves human nature far more efficiently by exploiting physical force in its non-human forms. Most of which is already an old story here.

So in development of the drawn battle and the consequent equality of the contestants we see the principle of democracy. The developed equality marks at once the passing of one type of battle, the ways of it becoming general or common and so secondary and only mediative, and the inception of another type of battle, just as before we saw democratic equality mediating between one aristocracy and another aristocracy. It is well to remember that battle and aristocracy, although quite different in their ordinary associations, are after all about as nearly related as two things can be. Democracy, too, is no synonym for peace, but means only preparation for more skill, more efficiency, in conflict. In the fact that a drawn battle, the meeting of equal magnitudes, induces a battle of kinds may be seen those two levels or types of action or of valuation which were pointed out above, the drawn battle only preparing the way for the higher type. And also, as hardly needs to be said, in the new self-control and deeper finesse of the better and higher battle, we only see again the mediation, of which so much has been said. In any sort of battle there are always at work just those forces which make what is immediate mediate, what is institutional instrumental.

But I must bring this article to a close. That all I have said is in elaboration of the idea with which the article opened, namely, that equality as a term in actual use must be relative and contextual, is clear to me and, as I now hope, clear also to others. Even in the drawn battle and the conflicting types of battle he who runs can read the relativity of equality. But now there are just two things more to which I would call attention. The first has to do with "natural rights," so close to equality; and the second, with the notion frequently expressed, I think as a result of what I will call a sort of democratic or socialistic dreaming, that the bitter

conflict of "the interests," so called, under which society has long been suffering, will some day come to an end, giving place to something like benevolence and peaceful co-operation. As to natural rights, in a very real sense these must evidently be earned or realized, however "natural." Whatever at any given time they may be, natural rights are the material content of some democratic equality, but democratic equality for its content always depends on a changing context, having one context, for example, in an anti-militaristic democracy and another in an anti-industrialistic democracy. Society, then, does not just have natural rights; it has them or, more exactly, its members have them only when and as they have been achieved. Social progress may well be measured by the progressive loading of the terms, natural rights and equality, with ever-new and richer meanings. Natural rights not just are; they become, as society comes to be capable of them. But, secondly and finally, as to the conflict of "the interests," this, like any other conflict, may indeed pass, but let no one imagine that with its going—or with the going of any particular conflict—all conflict will cease. Benevolence and co-operation may ensue, but only that in new ways, with more subtle weapons, the same old contestants may contend anew. Even benevolence and co-operation are also relative terms. Progress is not just for or toward final peace, but for and toward the peace that makes better fighting possible.

Democracy is no golden age; but the gold of all ages, which some new aristocracy is ever ready to spend and, spending, to enjoy.